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THE ALTENBURG CASE

By GEORGE DYRE ELDRIDGE

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(Continued.)

Altenburg was still alive and Grimbleshaw satisfied himself by a superficial examination that there was no danger in delaying the operation on the crushed bone, which was made almost impossible at this moment by the lack of sufficient light. The mystery of the occupancy of the house isolated as he was, was to him of more instant importance than aught else, and he immediately began a thorough examination of the room he was in to the end of satisfying himself that the men, of whose presence he had had such startling evidence and who must be the perpetrators of this outrage, were actually gone.

He came at once upon evidence that the room had already been searched with a minuteness that had taken no little time. Drawers were open and their contents laid upon the floor. Even the strips of carpet that lay between the door and the bed, and the bed and fireplace, had been pulled aside. Under the bed itself, where he looked with the thought that some one might still be concealed, he found evidence of search.

Before he went downstairs again he once more tried the door of the opposite room only to find it still locked. He also listened for some little time, but did not catch again the sounds which he heard beyond the door when he first came. He made certain also that the door of the lower room was fastened, and then had to face the question of closing and locking the front door. It seemed to him, on that calm consideration he had not before given it, more apt to be a source of menace than escape, and therefore he closed it before passing into the room with the secretary. This, too, showed evidence of the thorough work of the intruders. One drawer in particular had evidently been broken open by the exercise of considerable force.

Near the pool of blood on the floor lay a heavy iron ruler, which showed clearly by the blood stains and a number of white hairs that adhered to it, that it was the weapon with which the crime had been committed. Understanding fully that even the position in which this ruler had fallen from the murderer's hand might be of importance, he was at pains not to touch or move it.

Again in the kitchen the question of securing assistance became pressing. He was absolutely ignorant of the whereabouts of Barber, and he dared not leave the house to ascertain. The injury to the telephone proved a purpose in cut off for a considerable time at least, all chance for help, and while this seemed inconsistent with the summons to himself, it stood out too clearly to be ignored. The unravelling of the mystery would have to be deferred, but even now it was a passing perplexity.

Up to this moment he had forgot entirely the woman servant. She was likely to be in bed somewhere, but the question of importance was, where? She now seemed his one means of obtaining aid. Back of the kitchen was a narrow passage, which appeared to lead to a buttry, and from this passage he discovered a steep stair, which ran to a loft above the kitchen. It must be here that the woman slept. His foot was on the stair when from the direction of the road arose a loud clamor of shouting and what seemed like an attempt at singing, a babel that was apparently approaching the house.

He hurried back to the kitchen. There the shouting sounded still louder, but remained incoherent. He threw open the door, and as he did so a man staggered out of the darkness, made a lunge for the door, missed it and tried again. This time he bolted through, struck his foot on the low sill and fell into the kitchen at full length. To his disgust Grimbleshaw found that he had on his hands a drunken Canadian, no drunk, in fact, that he did not stir from the spot where he fell, but drifted off at once into loud-snoring sleep.

While he was considering the situation from the viewpoint of this new complication, there arose the sound of a rapidly driven vehicle without. It was going in the direction of the road, and he reached the door in time only to catch Barber's voice urging on the already frantic horse. He shouted, but might as well have shouted to the wind. The boy whipped the horse harder, and in a moment Grimbleshaw stood silent, listening to the fast-lessening sound of the wheels.

HELP ARRIVES

The acquisition of a drunken Canadian at this point in the affair struck Grimbleshaw as a wholly unnecessary complication. The man's drunkenness and sleep were almost too natural. He suspected a trick, and, at least, every added factor that did not bring him aid was an embarrassment.

He accepted the hazard under admission of compulsion and again took up the finding of the servant, only to be again balked by the impossibility of waking her. At first he suspected her to be drugged, but later became satisfied that she was one of those beings of routine, accustomed to go to sleep at 9 o'clock and wake at 5, who are dead to the world and its happenings between those hours. There was, in any event, no help for him in that direction, and he returned to the kitchen with no alternative before him but to take the risk and go himself for help.

He began search for a lantern, and then recalled that there was one at the turn from the road into the fields that surrounded the house. He secured it and had started back, when he caught a glimmer of light from the chamber where the injured man lay, which he had visited again in searching for the lantern. Under the surprise of this new feature he stopped, with his eyes on the window. At that instant the form of a man passed across it, going in the direction of the bed. He seemed as tall but not

as stout as Altenburg, and his movements were those of a much younger man. Grimbleshaw waited what seemed to him an interminable time, and then the light reappeared the window, but whoever carried it was so far back in the room as not to be seen. It showed again, passing the window in the hall, when Grimbleshaw again caught a glimpse of the man, and then it suddenly disappeared. As it must have shone through the fanlight over the front door if the man had brought it down the stairs, Grimbleshaw concluded that he had extinguished it and descended in the dark. If this were so, the man was evidently about to leave the house by the front door, and, accordingly, Grimbleshaw hurried hither, only to find the door shut and fastened, as he had left it. Passing around to the kitchen door, he found that fastened also. Thus he was himself shut out of the house.

At least this served to settle the question of going personally for assistance, but before doing so it occurred to him to look at the telephone connection. Here he found clear evidence that the wires had been cut. Indeed, a considerable length of wire was missing, as if to render impossible the immediate repair of the breach.

Now, however, that he was actually shut out from the house, the instinct of the physician prevailed, with aroused anxiety for the condition of his patient. On the chance of there being another door he passed around the house, following the side beyond the central chimney. As he turned the farther corner he caught the sound of footsteps, as if at least two persons were moving away rapidly. They passed to the rear of the barn and ceased. Then came the sound of galloping horses, whose riders were urging them to speed. Evidently, whoever had been his visitors were gone at last. He turned to continue his search for a door, and found one that he concluded led into the passage to the buttry, but this, like the others, was fastened. He had made the circuit of the house twice, trying the windows in vain, and came to the front a third time, when a rapidly driven buggy turned in from the road. He held up his lantern, and almost before the buggy stopped a man leaped to the ground. It was Malbon, the police captain.

"Dr. Grimbleshaw!" he exclaimed. "It was you then who phoned me?"

"I've phoned nobody," replied the doctor, in surprise. "The instrument is out of order."

"But I was phoned from eight, four, two, and central said that was Altenburg's number."

"How long ago?"

"Not twenty minutes."

Grimbleshaw in answer stepped to the side of the house and held up his lantern to show the break in the wire. "I've been here an hour and seen more queer things, but none so queer as telephoning from that would be."

In a few words he told his story to Malbon and the officer with him. "There's nothing for it but to break the door down," the chief declared, promptly; but even this was more easily said than done, for the door and lock proved strong, and it required considerable force to effect an entrance.

On the floor of the kitchen the Canadian was still sleeping as Grimbleshaw had left him. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed in the room with the secretary, but in the chamber where the injured man lay a trunk, which Grimbleshaw had noted standing at the foot of the bed, had been pulled out, and its contents, which were largely packages of papers, tied and labeled, were scattered over the floor. The two officers went immediately to the side of the bed.

"That's an ugly cut," said Malbon, turning to the physician.

"So ugly he hasn't once chance in a hundred. As soon as it's daylight he'll have to be operated on. It's the one chance, but a mighty slim one. Hold your light a little this way and I'll get a better look than I've been able to get yet."

When he straightened himself again Malbon looked at him, but without asking the question that was on his lips. The doctor shook his head.

"He'll never regain consciousness. I doubt if he lives till morning. You'd better get another physician here as quickly as you can."

The second officer was sent at once to the village. "Get Clarke or Boyce, or, better, both of them," Malbon said, with a glance at Grimbleshaw, who nodded assent. "Stop at Fry's and send him up, and you might let Russell, the county attorney, know."

While they waited the coming of these Malbon went carefully over the house and noted all that Grimbleshaw had reported, and, not improbably, several other matters. They did not attempt to break into the locked rooms, as the officer preferred additional witnesses when he did so. He allowed nothing to be disturbed, even letting the sheet stay in the corner of the entryway, as Grimbleshaw had done.

"I want Fry to see it. Just as it is," he explained. "He's got a sharp eye for the little things that you or I'd miss. When he's seen all he'll say 'Send for Trafford,' and that's one thing I want Russell for. If that's to be done I'll let him take the responsibility."

The others came, and the doctors confirmed Grimbleshaw's opinion, excepting that they counseled an immediate operation, on the chance that the man might regain consciousness sufficiently to give a clue to the murderer. Fry went from room to room, noting everything and touching nothing, and in the end advised, as Malbon had foretold, the sending for Trafford, to which the county attorney at once assented.

In the course of the search it was found that there was a side passage leading from the one to the buttry, into which the rear outer door opened. At the end of this was another door opening, apparently, into the room of which the other door opened into the front entryway.

The officers now forced the door from this entryway, the key being found in the inner lock. It gave access to a room comfortably, though far from luxuriously, furnished as a sitting or living room. The windows had heavy green shades under their white curtains, and back of these were old-fashioned wooden shutters, securely closed. There was a carpet of ingrain on the floor, marked with foot-prints that proved but partly dry. A large couch at the farther end had almost the appearance of a bed, and on it was an impress, as if some one had recently been lying there. At its foot was a door which was unfastened and led into a tiny entry, on which opened the door from the side passage. This was fastened, as has been said, but the key was not in the lock.

There was no window in the entry, but a third door opened into what seemed a closet, but proved a narrow stairway, which led to the room above, into which it had entrance without hall or entryway. This room was furnished as a bedroom, with a large four-poster, much like that on which Altenburg was lying. The bed had evidently been recently used. The windows were as carefully curtained and shuttered as those below. The key was in the lock of the door leading to the upper hall, and there were foot-prints on the carpet, as was the case below, only not so distinct.

One of the officers was able to identify the sleeping Canadian as the man of all work about the farm. Indeed, he had been in the village during the evening in a quarrelsome mood, and finally was induced to go home under threat of the lock-up. Evidently he had liquor with him, or else had secured it on the way home at one of those illicit drameries which are the bane of prohibitory localities.

While this investigation was in progress the physicians, performed the operation on the injured man. The

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vain hope of his regaining consciousness faded with the man's ebbing strength, and in the early hours of the morning he died, thus destroying the means of resolving the mystery of his undoing.

VI.

TRAFFORD AND BECKWITH.

On the morning of the day succeeding that of Altenburg's death Mrs. Altenburg came to Lancoboro and went at once to the farm. She was a woman of fifty-five, who at times looked to be seventy. She was accompanied by her son and daughter, the latter a girl of twenty, and the son some five years older. In the afternoon of the same day the son gave out the following statement through their attorney, Harrison Beckwith:

"My mother was not the wife, but the sister, of the late John Altenburg. Her name is Mrs. Elizabeth Cadden, but for family reasons some ten years ago she assumed that of her brother and permitted herself to be known as his wife. My sister's name is Judith, and my own Horace Cadden. Six months ago my mother left her brother's house to take up her residence elsewhere. Her return at this time is due solely to her brother's death and the necessity of looking after his affairs. She is prepared to do everything in her power to secure the arrest and punishment of his murderer, if it be proved to have been murder."

This statement caused a sensation in Lancoboro second only to that caused by the murder itself. Bushrod Trafford, the detective summoned at Fry's instance, read the paper within five minutes of his arrival. He was struck at once by the little that it said under the guise of absolute frankness. The public had been taken into the family's confidence without being told anything. His first visit was to Beckwith's office.

"How much am I to be told?" he asked as soon as their greetings were over.

Beckwith glanced at the detective with something resembling a smile on his lips, and yet with an air not unlike that which the latter wore when he wished to emphasize his professional character, as he did at this moment. Each felt that in the other he had something of his own qualities to meet. Beckwith's eyes relaxed

nothing of the domineering slight, which was their marked characteristic. "I might answer with another question. How much do you want to know—from us? That, I presume, will be about the measure of it finally. We are prepared to tell what is necessary to the work you have to do. At the same time, I'll be frank with you, we don't care to tell anything more," and he handed him the printed statement.

"I don't need to be told that you, or some other keen-edged lawyer, wrote that," said Trafford. "It's so simple that some wond'ers why it was ever given out, until one sees that on nothing short of this could the woman take a single step. At the same time it seems to say so much that ninety-nine people out of a hundred won't

(Continued on Page 15.)

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